

# **United Way**

OF  
**ESSEX AND  
WEST HUDSON**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## MOVIE PREMIERES IN NEWARK

IT'S MY HOME -- a documentary film on life in a central city -- will premiere at 3 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 23, 1980, at Newark Symphony Hall, 1020 Broad St., Newark, N.J.

The first full-length motion picture documentary filmed entirely in Newark features three families who open their homes and their hearts to share with the viewer their day-to-day lives in America's third oldest city.

United Way is presenting IT'S MY HOME as a benefit to raise special funds for beneficiary agencies, particularly those affecting cities such as Newark.

"This is a special cultural and historical event for Newark -- and New Jersey," said Joseph J. Riley, president of United Way and vice president of personnel for New Jersey Bell Telephone Co.

"For the first time, we're getting a penetrating analysis of the lives of those who make Newark what it is today."

The core of the documentary -- which mirrors the realities of Urban America -- are three families: Black, white and Portuguese.

The black family lives in the South Ward of Newark, the white family in the North Ward, and the Portuguese family in the Ironbound section, an ethnic community with its own identity.

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The camera also takes the viewer into the lives and homes of other residents, including "pioneer settlers" reclaiming old, abandoned buildings.

There is a dramatic account of what the filmmakers call "the last ghetto survivor" -- an 80-year-old widower surviving alone in a charred, boarded-up tenement, the last structure and last occupant in a burned-out block of once-decent housing in Newark.

The city's growing Spanish community is another facet of urban life that is examined in close detail, especially the assimilation of Hispanic culture into a modern day melting pot.

A powerful scene depicts miraculous open heart surgery at Beth Israel Medical Center by renowned surgeon Dr. Victor Parsonnet.

And a climactic moment is captured at a packed Sunday service in New Eden Baptist Church, humbly housed in a former mechanics garage.

Filmmakers Gordon Bishop and Saul Taffet started the project in May of 1979 and completed it in September of 1980.

Bishop, a national award-winning journalist and writer with THE STAR-LEDGER, Newark, conceived the idea of a movie on the conditions of Urban America, using Newark, New Jersey's largest city, as the focus.

The project surfaced after Bishop completed a course on Filmmaking at the New York University School for Continuing Education. His instructor was Saul Taffet, founder of the film school and a distinguished independent filmmaker.

Taffet, just coincidentally, was born and raised in the Weequahic section of Newark, a fashionable place to live in the 1930's and '40s.

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"Doing a picture on my hometown some 40 years after I left to serve in World War II was an inspiring challenge," Taffet says. "Gordon handed me a rough outline of his Newark proposal after class one night, and that was the beginning of an exciting venture and partnership. I had never worked with a journalist before, and this was his first foray into film."

The movie was filmed, in the language of the craft, in the cinema vérité style. Taffet explains:

"You record each unrehearsed moment as it happens, letting the people and the camera tell the story. It's as close to reality as you can come."

Filming began the first week in March 1980 and the last "shoot" was finished the fourth week of September. In all, some 20 hours of footage and 30 hours of sound track were gathered over a six-month period.

"We want to show what Newark is -- inside and out," Bishop says. "Who are the people of Newark? Why do they live in Newark? What do they do? What do they think, feel, believe, want?"

These are some of the questions Bishop and Taffet set out to answer in their documentary.

The filmmakers interviewed, on locations throughout the city, scores of people, including Newark Mayor Kenneth A. Gibson, Newark Congressman Peter Rodino, State Senator Wynona Lipman, United States Senator Bill Bradley, Archbishop Peter L. Gerety, and several business leaders -- Prudential Chairman Robert Beck, Newark Chamber of Commerce Chairman Rudolph Novotny, president of the U.S. Savings Bank, and Charles Whigham, Newark's first black bank president and a funeral director.

Several spontaneous interviews were conducted on the street with laborers, welfare recipients and some of the "forgotten souls" of Urban America.

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Taffet and Bishop worked with a five-member film crew, all of whom have done motion pictures and television documentaries in New York and California.

Bishop served as producer and writer of the film, and Taffet as director and film editor. Bishop also is the narrator.

IT'S MY HOME is to be broadcast on national PBS television this winter.

Prudential Insurance Company of America is making prints of the Newark documentary available to the BBC in England and to the Canadian Broadcasting Corp. for airing in those countries.

The movie will also be available for film festivals and as an "entertaining informational source" for conferences and conventions whose themes relate to urban life in the 1980's.

The production was financed with funds and grants from Prudential, New Jersey Bell, Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Co., Public Service Electric & Gas Co., the Victoria Foundation, the Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge Foundation, the Florence and John Schumann Foundation, First National State Bank of New Jersey, The Howard Savings Bank, Fidelity Union Trust Co., Midlantic National Bank, Carteret Savings and Loan Association, First Jersey National Bank.

The nonprofit project was sponsored by the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce Foundation. It was the Foundation's first major media project.

Posters, flyers and tickets were printed by the New Jersey Institute of Technology, which is observing its centennial birthday this year.

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(Note: Messers. Bishop and Taffet are available for interviews.)